



QUESTIONS FOR THE NOMINEE FOR EDUCATION COMMISSIONER

By: John D. Moran, Principal Analyst,
Marybeth Sullivan, Associate Analyst

STATE COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

(CGS §§ 4-5 TO -7; CHAPTERS 163, 164, 166, 168-170, 172 & 173)

- Serves as the administrative officer of the State Department of Education (SDE) and administers, coordinates, and supervises the activities of the department in accordance with the State Board of Education's (SBE) policies.
- Directs and supervises numerous SDE programs including teacher and administrator certification, special education, technical high school system, charter and magnet schools, regional agricultural science centers, adult education, education accountability and school performance programs, and various grants to school districts and towns.
- Serves as secretary to the SBE; must compile and publish all regulations and acts which may be required and perform such duties as the board prescribes.
- SBE recommends education commissioner candidate to the governor; governor nominates candidate and submits nominee for approval by either house of the General Assembly.

QUESTIONS FOR NOMINEE

1. While the previous commissioner had not been a teacher, you have taught in Connecticut's public schools and rose through the ranks of the public education system. What challenges and opportunities for Connecticut education did you see as an insider and has your perception of those challenges and opportunities changed since you become interim commissioner several months ago?
2. How are you adjusting to managing an organization as large and diverse as SDE, and how have you approached learning about its strengths and weaknesses?
3. The state is in the midst of a lawsuit over whether it is adequately funding education for Connecticut's public school children. While not a final resolution to the lawsuit, the state supreme court has ruled that the state must provide an "adequate" education for all public school students. Does the lawsuit influence or hinder the work you do to improve education in the state?
4. The state has applied to the U.S. Department of Education for an extension of its current waiver from certain No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act requirements. How is SDE keeping the legislature informed about the waiver and any promises that SDE may make to the federal government in order to get the waiver approved? Is legislation necessary for a successful waiver application?
5. Does Connecticut need a waiver from NCLB? What would happen if the state did not receive one?
6. The current school year is the first year that all Connecticut school districts will give students the smarter balanced assessment (SBAC) for math and English in grades 3-8 and 11. Last year, about 90% of our school districts took the SBAC field test. SDE has the results of that field test but has not released them to parents, students, teachers, or administrators. Why has the department chosen not to release the results or aggregate scores? The new tests are expected to result in significantly lower scores. Would making some test data known help with the transition to the new tests?
7. Other states, including New York, have seen student scores drop significantly under the new test. How will you respond to complaints and concerns once the scores of this spring's SBAC tests are made public? When will the scores be made public?

8. What is SDE's position on students' ability to opt out of SBAC testing? How has the department communicated this position to school administrators and parents? How has the department instructed administrators to handle students who attend school on testing days but refuse to take the tests?
9. Last summer a controversy arose concerning Jumoke Charter School and its related charter management organization, Family Urban Schools of Excellence (FUSE). The matter involved the failure to perform proper background checks on new hires and charges of nepotism. What has the department learned about oversight of charter schools and what are you now doing differently as a result?
10. In recent years, new mandates have been placed on school districts and their staff. These mandates include, to name a few, new teacher evaluation systems, the Common Core standards, anti-bullying requirements, and safety and security requirements. How are districts, principals, and teachers handling the new requirements? Is this something that SDE is concerned with?
11. As the state continues to offer more educational opportunities that cross town lines – such as magnet, charter, and technical high schools, and agricultural science centers – should the state move toward disconnecting public education from municipal government and boundaries?
12. A large percentage of teachers leave the field every year and a growing number of reports indicate fewer college students are planning to become teachers. How do you think the teaching profession is faring in Connecticut? Do we have enough people who want to be teachers, and are the teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities doing a good job preparing them?
13. A legislative working group spent the past year examining special education services offered by boards of education and regional education service centers (RESCs) and recently released recommendations on how to improve these services. How would you describe the current state of special education and related services in Connecticut? How can SDE assist boards of education and RESCs with improving upon their delivery?
14. Connecticut has often been cited as having the largest achievement gap of any state in the nation. Do you agree with this assessment and what are steps you and the department can make toward closing it?

JM/MS:tjo